What is Bacillary dysentery?
Bacillary dysentery is an infectious illness caused by a bacterium (germ) called shigella.

What are the symptoms of bacillary dysentery?
These include:
- Watery diarrhoea (which is sometimes bloody)
- Stomach ache
- Fever
- Sometimes vomiting

It can take from one to three days after infection for the symptoms to develop and symptoms usually last for three to seven days. Most people who have dysentery will get better by themselves. Antibiotics are only used if symptoms do not clear up on their own.

While you still have symptoms it is important to drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost through vomiting and diarrhoea and to rest as much as possible.

Who can it affect?
Bacillary dysentery can affect all age groups. The young, the elderly and those who have an immune system which is not working properly may be at greater risk of developing more severe illness.

How is it spread?
Bacillary dysentery is spread from person to person through poor hygiene, for example not washing hands properly after using the toilet. In the UK, most cases are spread from person to person within families who live together and in other areas where people are in close contact, such as schools, nurseries and day centres.

Bacillary dysentery can also be spread through food where affected individuals with poor hygiene contaminate food by touching it with their dirty hands. This infection can also be spread by water in countries with poor sanitation systems where sewage systems allow untreated or partially treated sewage to contaminate drinking water.

How is it diagnosed?
It is diagnosed by a hospital laboratory from a stool (faecal) sample.

How can I prevent it spreading?
Attention to good personal hygiene is important.

Always wash and dry your hands:
- After using the toilet
- After changing a baby’s nappy
- Before preparing food
- After handling raw food
- After contact with pets and other animals
- After contact with contaminated bedding or clothing
Keep contact with an infected person to a minimum especially while they have symptoms.

At home, an infected person should keep a hand towel that only they use.

Wash all clothes, bedding and towels from an infected person in the washing machine at the hottest cycle possible for the type of clothing.

Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins regularly with hot soapy water.

Only drink water from safe sources, for example when abroad drink bottled water, use bottled water for brushing teeth, avoid ice in drinks if the ice is made from tap water.

Environmental Health

An Environmental Health Officer (EHO) will contact you to assess possible sources of your infection.

When can I go back to work, school or nursery?

You should stay away from work, school or public swimming pools until your diarrhoea has stopped for at least 48 hours. The Public Health Department may tell you to stay off longer or may ask for further faecal specimens. You must follow their advice.

For children who attend nursery, they will not be able to return to the nursery until advised by the Public Health Department.

Further information

For further information on bacillary dysentery (shigella infection) contact:

Health Protection Nurse Specialist, Department of Public Health, NHS Ayrshire & Arran

Telephone: 01292 885 858

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